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General Assembly

Seventy-first session

Official Records

98th plenary meeting
Monday, 11 September 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Thomson ..... (Fiji)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Statement by the Secretary-General

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Secretary-General: Let me begin with a warm and heartfelt thank you to the President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session, Mr. Peter Thompson. I thank you for your vision, energy and the unmistakable assertive voice that may have given some of us flashbacks to our grammar school principals. But most of all I thank you for helping to steer the Member States to a solid record of achievement over the past year. Day in and day out, you brought us together.

That spirit of unity has particular meaning today, the sixteenth anniversary of the horrific terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and other targets. That was an assault on the United States, but so many of our Member States also saw their citizens murdered on that day. I know the Assembly joins me in expressing our sorrow and solidarity on this day.

In looking back over the work of the seventy-first session of the Assembly, I see many highlights. Last September's high-level meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants adopted the landmark New York Declaration, which points the way towards compassionate and people-centred ways to address that challenge.

The resolution on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development set the stage for repositioning the United Nations to better support countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Assembly also took other important steps to advance the 2030 Agenda, including the establishment of the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries and the adoption of the indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

President Thomson, I know you were especially pleased to convene the Ocean Conference in June. That was a timely exercise that has helped to raise awareness about the need to sustainably use the world's marine resources. It also showed the big impact that small island developing States, such as Fiji, can have in shaping the international agenda and providing solutions for shared problems.

Over the past year the Assembly continued to serve as a forum for pressing global issues, from human trafficking to antimicrobial resistance. I have been pleased to see the doors of the Assembly opening even wider to vital partners, such as civil society, the private sector and, above all, young people.

Of course, this session of the Assembly also took up the task of selecting a new Secretary-General. With new features, such as candidate dialogues and vision statements, that process has established new standards of transparency and interactivity. It is an honour to have gained members' trust and to be sitting here today. I thank the Assembly as well for approving my proposal to establish the Office of Counter-Terrorism, a key element in the reforms that I have set in motion.

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To all the Member States, I offer my congratulations on a productive seventy-first session. To Ambassador Thomson, you once said that you wanted your tenure to be measured by how good a start we get in implementing the 2030 Agenda. By that yardstick, and many others, you can be very proud of your accomplishments.

Finally, to the incoming President Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, we look forward to working with him to build on the seventy-first session and make the seventy-second session a great success in serving the world's people.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General, especially for those kind words.

I will now make my own statement of conclusion. The time has come for me to say my last words from this high rostrum, from this desk at which I have had the great honour of sitting from time to time over the past eight years. I am accordingly given the privilege now of expressing some words of gratitude to a few people, whom I assure the Assembly merit great praise for the manner in which they have served the best interests of the General Assembly during the seventy-first session.

First and foremost, I give thanks and highest praise to Secretary-General António Guterres, who from the time of his swearing in on the stage before us has given his very all to protecting the well-being and formidable aspirations of this our Organization, and, indeed, thereby the world. I extend that gratitude to Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed for her resolve in taking up the vital responsibilities of reform and development.

To the Vice-Presidents of the seventy-first session and the Chairs of the six Main Committees, their support in managing the work of the Assembly was praiseworthy throughout. I especially thank the Vice-Presidents who took on the burden of Acting President of the General Assembly on the various occasions when I was overseas. I also thank the many facilitators, chairs and advisers whom I appointed to lead the various processes mandated by the General Assembly, all of whom performed to the highest standards of expectation.

I acknowledge with deep gratitude the close collegiality of the President of the Economic and Social Council and the Presidents of the Security Council during the seventy-first session. To the Chairs of the regional groups, we are grateful for the worthy work done on behalf of our five groups.

To the Under-Secretary-Generals and the Secretariat, especially Under-Secretary-General Catherine Pollard and the erstwhile staff of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, I offer my sincere thanks for their being ever-dependable and always ready to assist the presidency and the membership.

I thank Member States and the Permanent Missions for their encouragement and advocacy during the seventy-first session. In terms of communal effort, it was a year which I think we can all be proud of. I especially thank the Member States that contributed financially or through staff secondments to the Office of the President of the General Assembly. Every dollar received was deposited and administered directly through the United Nations Trust Fund.

To each and every one of the staff of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, so ably led by Chef de Cabinet Tomas Anker Christensen, I bow to their dedication to the work of the United Nations and their brilliant endeavours during the seventy-first session.

I extend final words of deepest gratitude to the Government of Fiji for supporting my term as President of the General Assembly, to all Fijians who serve and have served in the light blue berets and helmets of United Nations peacekeeping, and to Ambassador Luke Daunivalu and the staff of the Permanent Mission of Fiji for their ever reliable reinforcement of my work. I began my career with the Government of Fiji as a District Officer in Navua in 1972, and this seventy-first session has been an extraordinary opportunity to round off that service.

They say a speech should have a beginning, a middle bit and an ending. For the middle bit of this speech, I will now give a brief recount of some of the highlights of the seventy-first session.

Many of you recall the day I stood at the rostrum in this Hall and took an oath of office, committing to conduct my duties in all loyalty, discretion and conscience. I was the first President to take the prescribed oath, and you will hear it taken once more this afternoon when President-elect Miroslav Lajčák stands before you. Both the oath of Office and the code of ethics to which it refers are now displayed prominently at the entrance to the President's Office.

In addition, I was the first President to participate in the United Nations Financial Disclosure Programme and the first to rely solely on the United Nations regular budget allocation and contributions to the Office of the President of the General Assembly Trust Fund to run the office. I trust this will be judged as a continuation of the culture of transparency advanced by my predecessor President Lykketoft.

It was a sign of the great trust the membership places in the Office of the President that the transition from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to Secretary-General António Guterres was accomplished so smoothly. Following on from the unprecedented openness and inclusivity by which Secretary-General Guterres was selected and the Security Council's decisive and unanimous decision, the transitional ceremonials of paying tribute to the outgoing Secretary-General and swearing in the ninth Secretary-General were concluded in a manner that strengthened the authority of both the Assembly and the incoming Secretary-General.

Last September's high-level meeting of the General Assembly included the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which lays the groundwork for a more humane and coordinated approach to the challenges facing both refugees and migrants. The plight of the world's displaced, which remains at its highest level in decades, continues to demand sustained engagement and a more effective global response. In a similar vein, in just two weeks' time, the Assembly will address how better to combat the scourge of trafficking in persons. Following extensive consultations, the agreed draft declaration for that high-level meeting has been forwarded to the seventy-second session.

Last December, the General Assembly fulfilled its role under the Charter of the United Nations following a deadlock in the Security Council on the situation in Syria, by adopting resolution 71/248, which established the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

In May, the first step towards reforming the Secretariat under Secretary-General Guterres was taken. The Assembly adopted resolution 71/291, which established the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, aimed at enhancing the Organization's capability to assist Member States in implementing the United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy.

In June, the Fifth Committee asserted the Assembly's duty to those risking their lives in United Nations peacekeeping missions in the world's trouble spots, with Member States reaching an important compromise on the financing of those missions, culminating in the adoption of resolution 71/295.

On 7 July, a General Assembly-mandated conference pursuant to resolution 71/258 adopted the first-ever treaty banning nuclear weapons — the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons — a step forward that many Member States hope will inspire progress in other multilateral disarmament forums.

Through the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work the General Assembly, important provisions were adopted during the seventy-first session, relating to the alignment of the General Assembly's agenda with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, *The Journal of the United Nations*, the role of the General Committee and engagement with the Secretariat. Reform of the Security Council has been thoroughly debated in the course of the intergovernmental negotiations process established by Member States. It is clear that those negotiations will require a greater degree of flexibility of positions, if they are going to result in actual reforms. In the end it will be up to the willingness of Member States to explore convergences and commonalities that will result in the reforms that we seek.

As members know, the main effort of the seventy-first session was directed at achieving momentum in the implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Last Friday, I provided a comprehensive report on this subject to the General Assembly that highlights the advocacy and awareness-raising efforts undertaken by my Office. In the global efforts made in that regard, I particularly thanked Ms. Dessima Williams of my Office and the Special Envoy of the President of the General Assembly on SDG implementation and Climate Change, Ambassador Macharia Kamau of Kenya.

During Friday's interactive discussion with Member States and panellists, we discussed the outcomes of the five signature SDG action events convened during the seventy-first session, namely, on sustainable peace, climate change, SDG financing, innovation, connectivity, and education. I drew attention to the

many General Assembly mandates fulfilled during this session, ranging from General Assembly meetings on anti-microbial resistance, the new urban agenda, water-related goals and targets, and World Wildlife Day, to General Assembly decisions relating to the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, the Global Indicator Framework, the Technology Bank for Least-developed Countries, and South-South cooperation.

The jewel in the crown of the seventy-first session was the Ocean Conference, which attracted the attendance of the best of international expertise and ocean interests, and raised global consciousness in support of the targets of SDG 14. The Conference produced a-call-for-action document, which was subsequently adopted as resolution 71/312, and set out the need for urgent action to reverse the cycle of decline into which the ocean has been caught by accumulated human activity. A new community of actors was mobilized by the conference to support SDG 14 implementation, and approximately 1,400 voluntary commitments were received to begin work on restoring our relationship with the ocean to one of sustainability, respect and balance.

From the experience of the seventy-first session, I draw a number of key conclusions.

First, I believe that together we have succeeded in generating momentum right across the SDGs, and that the outlook for SDG implementation is positive.

Secondly, although progress is being made in some key areas, progress on individual SDGs on the ground is uneven, across regions, between the sexes, and among people of different ages, wealth and locales, including urban and rural dwellers.

Thirdly, the gaps in SDG awareness across the world remain far too wide, which we must correct if the people of the world are to embrace the transformations of systems and behaviours required for a sustainable way of life on the planet.

Fourthly, major gaps also exist in the United Nations system's capacities and abilities to effectively and coherently support Member States on SDG implementation, as indicated in the Secretary-General's *Sustainable Development Goals Report*, issued in July. I strongly encourage Member States to support the Secretary-General in addressing those gaps and in advancing those and other reforms over the coming period.

Fifthly, The Ocean Conference demonstrated the power of bringing together a wide range of actors to respond to SDG implementation. Partnerships and collaboration will be key to the success of the SDGs, and a more systematic approach is needed towards facilitation of that collaboration.

Sixthly, a major shift is required in the area of financing — a shift towards aligning the financial system away from unsustainable investments towards the SDGs. A surge of private investment in developing countries is required, particularly in areas such as energy and infrastructure. We must see a significant increase in development assistance, a dramatic improvement in global tax cooperation and a review of global trade and other economic policies to align them with the SDGs' focus on inclusion and sustainability. The United Nations has a critical role to play in that area, while bringing key partners together and advocating for effective action.

Lastly, we must embrace the power of innovation and technology to leverage SDG implementation and combat climate change at the speed and scale required. I cannot underline this message strongly enough. We are witnessing exponential change in multiple areas of technology, and we must manage the risks and seize the opportunities for the common good of humankind and the planet.

We then get to the "ending bit" of this statement. The seventy-second session — focused on people, striving for peace and a decent life on a sustainable planet — holds much promise along with the Secretary-General's reforms under way and the upcoming high-level meeting on sustaining peace. In keeping with what is now established practice, it has been a pleasure to provide support to President-elect Miroslav Lajčák, including by preparing a comprehensive handover report summarizing the work done by my Office during the seventy-first session. Having gotten to know him over the past six months, I am happy to say to everyone that the President of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session is a man of excellent character, rich experience and firm commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter. The gavel will be in safe hands as of tomorrow morning

I finish the seventy-first session the way in which I opened it: with full conviction that the only way in

which we can safeguard the future of our grandchildren on Planet Earth is by the faithful implementation of the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Implementation is well within our grasp. We have the master plan. We have universality and inclusivity of purpose. We certainly have the resources, and we definitely have the ingenuity to get there.

As I said last Friday, we have not come this far as a species only to be defeated by greed, but let us never forget that there are great responsibilities that come with the 2030 Agenda, including responsibilities for sustainable consumption and production; for equity between and within countries and between gender, races and age groups; for commitment to investment in infrastructure, services, industries and decent employment; and for embedding the principle of sustainability into everything that we do. No growth or development brings any good to us, if in the end it detracts from the sustainability of our way of life on the planet.

The 2030 Agenda calls on us to conserve and sustainably manage the ecosystem in which we live in all its terrestrial, oceanic and climatic dimensions. We will be stealing from our grandchildren's future if we continue to take more from the planetary ecosystem than it can sustainably grant. That is the truth within which all other aspects of the 2030 Agenda exists. We live within the fundament. The ocean, the climate, and the air we breathe unite us.

For my part, as I now bid the Assembly adieu, after my departure on leave tomorrow I intend to dedicate my working days to ocean action and to continue in the dogged pursuit of the targets of SDG 14 so that we might arrive at the year 2030 with an ocean restored to sustainable health. I hope to join with many of my dear colleagues here in making that so. I bid them good luck with their preparations for the forthcoming high-level week; to look after our Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session; and to keep their hands ready for the momentous tasks awaiting them during the seventy-second session. It has been a mighty privilege to have been of service to the Assembly from this high rostrum. Adieu.

The members of the General Assembly expressed their thanks to President Thomson by acclamation.

The President: As we are now coming to the end of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly, may I know invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation, as is our custom.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 70/305, of 13 September 2016, I now invite His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, President-elect of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session, to take an oath of office.

The President-elect: I solemnly declare that I shall truthfully perform my duties and exercise the functions entrusted to me as President of the General Assembly of the United Nations in all loyalty, discretion and conscience, and that I shall discharge these functions and regulate my conduct with the interest of the United Nations only in view and in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the code of ethics for the President of the General Assembly, without seeking or accepting any instruction in regard to the performance of my duties from any Government or other source external to the Organization.

Closure of the seventy-first session

The President: I would now like to invite the President-elect of the seventy-second session to meet me at the side of the rostrum for the handing over of the gavel.

I declare closed the seventy-first session of the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.